



CORE CONTENT: What is Included?

Introduction: WHAT to Teach About Jewish Peoplehood?

In the **Conceptual Overview** of this Toolkit, we offer some suggestions for WHY it is worthwhile, even critical, for Jewish educators and leaders to address questions of Jewish Peoplehood.

In the **Pedagogic Overview** we explain HOW this can be done most effectively, in order to create strongly committed Jews with the tools to act for the good of the Jewish People.

In this section we deal with the WHAT to teach in the context of Jewish Peoplehood. What are the key content areas of a rich and full curriculum of Jewish Peoplehood?

The first approach to answering this question is to emphasize that the core content for Jewish Peoplehood is broad and multifaceted. Teaching Jewish Peoplehood is far more than the information about who the Jewish People are today (even in all their diversity) and where they can (or used to) be found.

While the mapping, demographics and realities of contemporary Jewry are certainly part of the whole picture, they are by no means the only (or even the most important) part of what we consider the core elements of Jewish Peoplehood education.

Core Content for Jewish Peoplehood Education

Our approach to the content of Jewish Peoplehood education is that many of the topics and themes that we would typically expect to find in Jewish education should also be part of a vision and curriculum for Jewish Peoplehood education.

It is the WAY that they are taught that makes the difference between an educational experience that reflects the Peoplehood perspective and pedagogy, and a more traditional perspective and pedagogy. As we emphasize in the Pedagogic Introduction the Peoplehood perspective emphasizes the exploits of the Jews as a People, focusing on the stories of individuals, families, communities and

the fruits of a deep tradition of collective belonging and responsibility.

The perspective also emphasizes that our students and learners are active members of the global collective, with the ability to contribute to the future well-being and thriving of the People.

Given this approach, we believe that Jewish Peoplehood education is expansive and broad and, in an ideal situation, includes the following constituent elements (in no particular order):

- Community
- Covenant
- Values
- Contemporary Jewish life
- Jewish Religion
- History
- Traditional Texts (including Biblical and Rabbinic texts)
- Cultural Expression (including literature, music, arts)
- Hebrew Language
- Israel (as vision and venture of the Jewish People)

While all of the components could stand on their own as independent topics, our interest is in the context by which they interact together to form the collective ethos. Below we will relate to each of these constituent components, highlighting their presentation from a Peoplehood perspective and offering some thoughts about the role of the educator.

Constituent Elements of Jewish Peoplehood Community

One of the unique features of Jewish existence throughout history is the place and role the community played in the lives of the Jews. With the loss of sovereignty and control over Israel and Jerusalem in ancient Israel, Jews focused on developing the local community as the core Jewish social framework, responsible comprehensively for the lives and well-being of its members.

As we describe in **Mutual Responsibility**, the community took care of the Jew from birth until death (including burial) and left no significant aspect of personal and communal life unattended. This was true of Jewish communities in all corners of the world. It was as if once the sovereign kingdom was destroyed, each community became a small “kingdom” functioning as an interim solution until redemption.

It is important to note that focus on community is also relevant in contemporary terms. For example, the impressive ways by which the American Jewish community (and others) was built in the 20th century, as well as the history of the kibbutz movement, are worthy of study and discussion. The communal spirit has been an integral component of Jewish civilization throughout history and throughout the world.

Framing the micro-level Jewish community as a cell of the larger body of the People or as the manifestation of Peoplehood is the role of the educator in this context. It is not about community for community’s sake, but about building intentional values-driven communities that sustain the People in its global form.

Similarly, understanding that Peoplehood constitutes Jewish community and its multiple organizations (Federations, congregations, JCCs, etc.) can help bring the Peoplehood agenda home to our communities.

Covenant

Covenant refers to a commitment to sustain the Jewish People for a purpose, and not just for the sake of its continued existence. The covenant is the glue that binds the Jewish People together, so that they can act collectively to contribute to making the world a better place.

This is based on the assumptions that the Jewish People is not just something of the past nor is it an entity with a totally particularistic agenda. Rather, the Jewish People emerge from a particular history, as a positive force with a purpose in the world. At first glance this may appear to be two different commitments: The first to the Jewish People and the second to its broader mission.

And yet those two are connected: The Jewish people will continue to thrive as long as its members feel that by being part of it they are advancing the good of humanity in addition to advancing the people itself. Putting concrete content into Peoplehood is the challenge for each generation.

It is the role of the educator to maximize the opportunity for students to take the lead in discussing what purposes justify continuing the covenant? What gives meaning to the covenant, for them? What should be the guiding purpose of the Jewish People for the next generations?

Values

The Jewish People has been guided by core values that are expressed in texts, rituals, Jewish law (halakha) and customs. They include: community; truth and justice; lovingkindness (hesed); education; respect and more. In the context of Jewish Peoplehood the values that are probably most relevant are those of justice (tzedek) and charity (tzedakah). These values were most powerfully expressed in ancient times in the words of the Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and others who set the example for pursuing justice and challenging the social order. A significant part of the Jewish collective ethos is that its commitment to justice and tzedakah will not tolerate abuse and unfair treatment of human beings (or animals). The contemporary Jewish interest in Tikkun Olam is the most recent expression of an approach that does not accept the status quo and seeks to improve the lot of those in need.

Sharing with students the notion that a core component of Jewish Peoplehood is the ethos of social action is perhaps the most rewarding part of teaching Jewish Peoplehood. History provides us with an abundance of examples that should make any Jew proud of this part of our heritage. Connecting that past with opportunities to express those values in the future is a meaty and inspiring challenge for any educator.

Contemporary Jewish Life

In order to actively participate in contemporary (and future) Jewish Peoplehood, it is crucial to understand who the Jewish People are today, in all

their diversity and richness. The cultures in which Jews build their communities, the challenges and innovations they are involved with, and the expressions of their Jewish values are all expressed in the richness of Jewish communal life around the world, and should find their place in any curriculum dealing with Jewish Peoplehood.

The educator's role here is to create frameworks and opportunities for exposing students to different types of Jews and to diverse and broad Jewish civilization across the globe. Mifgashim and Jewish travel are particularly good tools, but they are not the only ones.

Jewish Religion

We assume that all of the Jewish people are members of the Jewish religion, even those for whom religion is not the primary mode of identification. Indeed, the foundations of the people's common cultural and civic assets originated from religious texts and heritage and even current Jewish expressions in the universalistic secular context originated in the core Jewish religious texts.

So from a Peoplehood perspective, Judaism as a religion is an important component of Jewish Peoplehood, but not sufficient for full understanding of it. As a result, it is important to include a component about Jewish religion in a curriculum dealing with Jewish Peoplehood, even just to recognize that from a Peoplehood perspective, being a member of the people is not defined or limited by the content of one's religious belief.

Thus, a secular and an ultra orthodox Jew are of equal standing with diverse practices and customs worthy of study and expression.

In this context the role of the educator is to allow learners to experience religion as a source of our commonality, while encouraging a pluralism of expression and opinion.

Jewish History

Jewish history is a core element of the collective memory that constitutes the Jewish People's ethos and sense of common fate. From the Peoplehood perspective what is important is that Jewish history is embraced by the Jews as their collective story with symbolic meaning. The emphasis is often on the notion of the collective memory rather than history in its formal sense (see for example Infeld's 5 Legged Table). Examples such as "every person should see himself as if he was part of the exodus from Egypt," place emphasis on building collective identity and the value of freedom at the forefront.

The educator needs to focus on history as the unique story of the Jews as a People and to raise the question of how the Jewish Peoplehood effectively contributed to the long term survival of Jewish civilization and on the People's ability to rejuvenate and reinterpret itself through the ages. What can we learn from Jewish history that can help us towards the future?

Traditional Texts

The Jews have earned themselves the title of "the People of the Book" because of the respect they

have for the written word and the wisdom of past generations. This approach created a culture of study and trying to seek guidance from ancient texts in addressing new challenges.

In some cases this was based on a religious belief, in others from intellectual respect and curiosity. And for others, dwelling on Jewish texts is a way to connect with the Jewish People. Here again, a sense of unity in all these cases is the frame of reference from the same body of Jewish texts.

Educators of Jewish Peoplehood believe that Jewish texts belong equally to all Jews, no matter their backgrounds or religious beliefs. All students are encouraged to seek insight, wisdom and guidance, as well as to contribute to the texts that belong to all of them as members of the Jewish People.

Cultural Expression

Surrounding the inner (core) circle of traditional biblical and rabbinic religious texts, a larger circle of Jewish cultural expression has developed that has become significant in shaping collective Jewish identity.

Music, folklore and literature (amongst other expressions) enables Jews to explore their contemporary concerns and issues from a Jewish perspective and to add new layers to Jewish wisdom. For example, the writers Shmuel Yosef Agnon and Isaac Bashevis Singer had enormous influence on Jewish consciousness in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Similarly, modern Hebrew literature and music reflects and informs Israeli Jewish identity. Poets, artists, film-makers and more have all created varied forms of creative expression that serve

as platforms for current dialogue about Judaism and between Jews.

Educators play a critical role here in bringing Jewish culture, in all its manifestations, to the attention of students and the Jewish public. Educators can introduce students to an enormous wealth of cultural creativity with significant educational power.

Hebrew

The role of Hebrew in making Jewish Peoplehood unique and special is often underestimated. The place of Hebrew is, firstly, symbolic. It is the language of the Jewish People, their central texts, liturgy and conversation across generations, regardless of dispersion or time period. Hebrew today is also the language of the Jewish State, where approximately half of the world Jewish population use that language for daily communication and cultural expression. And it is the language that, to varying degrees, serves to connect Jews from around the world, allowing, for example, a Mexican Jew to communicate with an Australian Jew. The story of the revitalization of the Hebrew language is also an inspiring example of how the Jewish People (led by a visionary leader in this case) took an ancient cultural tool and turned it into a vital, evolving method for creating new culture.

In Jewish Peoplehood education we recommend incorporating Hebrew as a Peoplehood practice to the greatest extent possible. Educators ask their students about the significance of being part “owners” of a language that can connect them to

Jews, Jewish culture and history across time and space.

Israel

As we outlined in the theme dealing with Israel, Israel is, together with Torah and the People, a core component of Judaism. Not only has it functioned symbolically to help the Jewish People remain united for almost 2000 years of dispersion, but today it is the concrete State of the Jewish People. As the vision and venture of the Jewish People, and currently the home to half of all the Jewish people, it is also the place where for the first time in 2000 years the nature of Jewish sovereignty is being explored.

This dramatic change of the 20th century had a huge impact on Jewish Peoplehood. Many new opportunities opened up along with the emergence of new challenges for Jewish Peoplehood (as discussed in other sections of this Toolkit). How does Israel continue being central to Jewish life throughout the Jewish world? How do the Jewish People remain central to Israel? How does the State reinvigorate the Jewish People? How do the People reinvigorate the State?

The role of the educator here is to raise key questions and address the complexities of Israel-Diaspora relations for the Jewish People as a whole.